

GREAT SWAMP IN DANGER

Bradley tours refuge, vows 'systematic' cleanup effort

By GORDON BISHOP

Concerned over the pollution and development endangering one of New Jersey's "natural wonders," Sen. Bill Bradley (D-N.J.) yesterday conducted a walking and driving tour through the Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge for federal and state officials and the media.

The Great Swamp in Morris and Somerset counties—a 6,000-acre vestige of the last Ice Age 10,000 years ago—is being threatened by encroachment, development, sewage, garbage, toxic waste, asbestos and contaminated storm water runoff, according to a study completed in April by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Bradley is a member of the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, which has jurisdiction over wildlife and refuge activities within the Department of Interior.

Bradley, wearing a brown Fish and Wildlife cap and carrying powerful binoculars, pledged to initiate a "systematic approach" to protecting and cleaning the Great Swamp, which in 1964 became the first wildlife refuge established in the East by the federal government.

There are more than 600 refuges encompassing 90 million acres in 49 states and five trust territories.

Bradley, who also serves on the Appropriations Committee, said the federal government must develop a comprehensive and efficient method of dealing with sources of contamination in America's wildlife areas.

Bradley inspected an asbestos site in the heart of the refuge, as well as a sprawling 125-acre landfill, 25 acres of which lie within the preserved domain.

The senator also stopped on a bridge over Loantaka Brook in Chatham Township and learned that local residents swam in the tributary 20 years ago. As a result of construction and a sewage treatment plant discharging effluent into the waterway, swimming is no longer permitted. The creek is filling up with silt and is now unfit for recreation.

Accompanying Bradley on his tour were Helen Fenster, who led the campaign in 1958 to save the swamp from being designated as the fourth jetport in the metropolitan region, and two officials from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)—Bob Harvill, grove of the environmental impacts branch and John Prince of the superfund office.

Fenster is assistant state environmental commissioner of natural resources.

Bradley was informed by his tour guide, refuge manager Bill Koch, that the swamp is rapidly being filled in by runoff from development around its periphery. Eleven municipalities either abut the refuge or have land within it.

"We're experiencing greater floods and longer droughts because of uncontrolled growth around the swamp," Koch explained.

As sediment fills in the swamp, floodwaters have nowhere to go except to rise over roads and developed areas, according to Koch.

And as the swamp loses its ability to retain rainwater, droughts become more frequent because the water is no longer there. *Continued on page A-2, next column*



Photo by John A. Green Jr.

Sen. Bill Bradley checks out a section of the Rolling Knolls Landfill in Chatham Township during a walking tour with Bill Koch, manager of the Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge.

Bradley was told the swamp is home to more than 200 kinds of birds and 30 kinds of animals. Several species are endangered, including the bog turtle and the blue-spotted salamander.

Standing in the middle of one of three asbestos dumps in the refuge, Bradley pushed the end of his foot into the debris and asked one of the EPA officials, "What do you do with this?"

"It'll cost from \$2 million to \$6 million to move it out of here," Prince said. "We expect this to be on the superfund site list shortly."

Bradley, who has fought for funds to clean up hazardous waste sites, said he supports a \$7.5 billion superfund program over the next five years. Congress is considering two bills, one for \$7.5 billion and another for \$10 billion.

Bradley said that superfund, which expired last year, must be underwritten by a broad-based tax, such as an excise tax on manufacturers that generate waste.

Visiting the Rolling Knolls Landfill, Bradley was joined by the owner of the 125-acre dump which closed in 1968. Robert Meles said the land has been in his family since 1937 and it's now costing him a considerable sum of money to maintain the property and pay taxes on something he can no longer use.

Meles told Bradley he would donate the 125 acres to the federal government as an addition to the wildlife refuge.

Fenster pointed out that before the public assumed ownership of the landfill, Meles would be responsible for cleaning it up under a new state law known as the Environmental Cleanup Responsibility Act. Before any industrial or commercial properties can be sold in New Jersey, they must first be given a "clean bill of health" from the Department of Environmental Protection.

Act saved the Great Swamp from becoming a noisy jet airport, but that the swamp is not yet "safe."

Bradley said there has been a

"reawakened appreciation of the land" and that bodes well for congressional action this year or next on saving those refuge areas already established.